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4. — *Martin's History of France. The Age of Louis XIV.* By HENRI MARTIN. Translated from the Fourth Paris Edition by MARY L. BOOTH. Boston: Walker, Wise, & Co. 1865. 2 vols. 8vo. pp. xxii., 563, and viii., 543.

M. MARTIN'S *History of France*, in spite of great defects, is undoubtedly the most serviceable and valuable history of the nation to which it relates, and a good translation of it will fill an important place in the library of English historical works. The want of an extended *History of France* in English has long been felt, and it is probable that the immense scope of the undertaking has alone prevented any English or American scholar from attempting to supply it. Mr. Parke Godwin, indeed, some time since began the work, but seems, we regret to say, to have abandoned it at its first stage.

M. Martin's *History* has obtained the stamp of approbation from the highest French critical and literary authority. On three different occasions it has received a portion or the whole of the great Gobert annual prize of 10,000 francs for the best work on the *History of France*; first in 1844, as the award of the Academy of Inscriptions, and again in 1856 and 1859, as the award of the French Academy. In 1860, M. Martin was one of the leading competitors for a still more brilliant prize. In this year the French Academy had for the first time to bestow a biennial prize of 20,000 francs, founded by the Emperor, to be awarded to the work the most honorable or serviceable to the country produced during the preceding ten years, — each of the five Academies of which the Institute is composed to award in its turn. Three candidates for this prize were presented to the Academy, — George Sand, M. Martin, and M. Jules Simon, the well-known economist and moralist. Their rival claims were so warmly supported by their respective adherents, that a majority of votes could be obtained for neither, and the Academy freed itself from the dilemma in which it was thus involved, by selecting one of its own members, M. Thiers, to receive the prize. But the position given to M. Martin's name shows in what high esteem his work is held. No doubt a portion of its credit springs from the fact that it represents principles supposed to be adverse to the imperial régime. Political opposition may exhibit itself in a literary judgment. But whatever difference of opinion may exist in regard to it on this score, M. Martin's *History* is accepted by all parties in France as a work of distinguished merit.

Leaving out of question the older general histories which have now become obsolete, Sismondi and Michelet remain as competitors in the field with M. Martin. In certain respects each is his superior. Sis-

mondi had the disadvantage of not being a Frenchman, and his history shows a want of sympathy with some of the prevailing traits of the French genius. But if not always comprehensive enough in his feelings, and if sometimes under the sway of preconceived notions, he is usually thoughtful and sensible, while the strength and purity of his moral convictions often give dignity and breadth to his judgments of men and of affairs. It was his misfortune to write at a period when the original resources for a great part of the history were still unexplored. He came too early to profit by the fruitful researches of the school of historical investigators founded by such masters as Guizot and Thierry. These researches, beside illuminating the earlier period of the life of the nation, and affording the student the means of forming a clearer appreciation of individual characters, have disclosed partially at least the intricate succession of causes and effects, and have shown the relations of special events and institutions to the general progress of civilization.

Michelet, more fortunate than Sismondi in this respect, has made great use, sometimes well and sometimes ill, of the new materials. A man, if not of genius, at least with the temperament of genius, of fervid and ill-regulated imagination, of vague principles, of prurient fancy, and of much learning, he has produced a brilliant and often misleading comment upon history, rather than a true history. Facts serve him as the ornaments, rather than as the foundations, of dramatic generalizations. Occasionally, indeed, his penetrative imagination lights up a dark passage with unexpected brightness, or seizes the truth with quick and convincing intuition; but in the main he is an unsafe guide, and his style, which is now and then eloquent and poetical, is in the long run an abomination to those who prize moderation of statement, or prefer sober truthfulness to the most dazzling displays of rhetorical exaggeration.

M. Martin, without the dignity of Sismondi or the poetic spirit of Michelet, has a grasp of facts superior to either. His work is one of astonishing extent, and yet no part of it has been slighted. His thorough acquaintance with his subject is the result of unwearied industry, labor, and patience. He too has his theories, and views history through their medium; but he knows and he gives to his readers the facts on which they rest. Much of his philosophy of history is unsound, but it is instructive because based on wide inductions. He is a thorough Frenchman, and writes with the ardor of patriotic zeal, perhaps sometimes with the blindness of patriotic bigotry. For fulness of preparation, for fidelity of investigation, for exactness of statement, and for the scope and general fairness of his work, he deserves high praise. He

narrates concisely and well ; and his style, though rarely marked by any special beauty, and occasionally careless and inelegant, usually possesses the virtue of clearness. Altogether the book is that of an uncommonly skilful workman, rather than of a complete artist, — of a clever rather than a great author.

A proper criticism of the work would lead us too far. We can but repeat, that for the common reader as well as for the student it is, on the whole, the most serviceable general History of France, and as such is well worthy of translation. The two handsome volumes before us are the first instalment of the work in English, and present us with one of its most interesting portions, — that relating to the age of Louis XIV. In these volumes the merits and the defects of M. Martin are alike conspicuous. The story of this gilt rather than golden age is narrated clearly and intelligibly. The characters of the actors in it are plainly presented to view ; but the historian himself is sometimes dazzled by the brightness of the scene, in which France, Louis, the Court, Versailles, shine with resplendent aspect. The lustre of the time deludes him. It is the reign of magnificent and decorous pretences ; and the historian fails to recognize the unreality, the emptiness, of this great, wonderful, but unsubstantial pageant. The strange foreboding contrast between the realities of life and the actual business in which these actors are engaged does not strike him. *Le Grand Monarque* is only the biggest puppet on the stage. Everything is factitious, everything different from what it seems and from what it assumes to be. Rochefoucault's *Maxims* are but the counterpoise to Bossuet's *Funeral Discourses*. Nature is no longer respectable ; and human nature is exiled to take refuge in the true and delightful comedies of Molière. The tragedy that underlay these comedies no man saw. Racine was the great tragic author of the time !

M. Martin does not show any philosophic insight in his estimate of this pre-revolutionary epoch, but his book contains the facts from which readers may draw conclusions for themselves.

To translate well such a book as this, the translator must have, not only intelligence, patience, accuracy, and a good knowledge of the French language, but a better knowledge of the English than is usually possessed even by tolerably educated persons. The number of subjects treated is so great, and their nature so various, that a vocabulary both wide and exact is required, together with a large stock of specific historical knowledge, as well as of general knowledge derived from other sources.

The translation before us is a proof of the industry and good intentions of the translator, but, we sincerely regret to say, gives evidence

of the want of other requisite qualifications for the satisfactory performance of the task. The translator has not that command over English which is essential for a good style, especially in preventing the transference of a foreign idiom into our own language. The pages of these volumes are sprinkled with Gallicisms, which annoy the reader; and they are not free from errors which may mislead him, and for which it is difficult to find excuse.

The first chapter relates mainly to the financial condition of France during the earlier years of the reign of Louis, from 1661 to 1672. The subject is an intricate one, and, owing to the number of technical terms required in treating of it, makes great demands on the accuracy and intelligence of the translator. The first page of the translation prepares us for disappointment. The fourth sentence stands thus: "The court did not wholly experience the same impressions as the people"; — an awkward form of expression in itself, and an incorrect rendering of the original, "*La cour n'éprouva pas tout à fait les mêmes impressions que le peuple*," — "The court did not experience altogether the same impressions as the people."

In the fourth line from the foot the important word "councils" is omitted, and the next sentence is very imperfectly rendered.

We proceed to give, in the briefest manner, a few specimens of the numerous errors we have noticed in this chapter.

The verb *prétendre* is often and inaccurately rendered by "pretend." P. 2, "Fouquet pretended to purchase," for *aspired* to purchase. P. 4, "pretend to rear monstrous fortunes"; read, *attempt* to rear, &c.

On p. 6, we find "villain tax" as the translation of the word *taille*, and the same rendering is preserved throughout the History, in which the word very frequently recurs. It would have been far better to retain the French word, for which we have no equivalent in English, and to explain its meaning in a note, than to translate it by a phrase at once so incorrect and misleading.

P. 8, "The *penny post* had been established at Paris in May, 1653." An anachronistic mistranslation of the phrase *la petite poste*, which means simply the city post, in distinction from *la grande poste*, the post throughout the kingdom and to foreign countries.

P. 14, "villages . . . were authorized to resume possession of usages . . . alienated during the war." The French *usages*, in such a connection as this, means *rights*; the sentence as it stands has no meaning.

P. 15, "Disastrous conditions had consumed twenty millions of the annual revenue." Read, "Some twenty millions of the annual revenue had been alienated on disastrous conditions."

P. 18, "they caused purely fictitious *credits* to be paid by the state." "*Créances*" means *debts*.

P. 25, "Brittany and Normandy, where old malecontents were lurking." Read, "old discontents were brooding."

P. 30, "*He conducted* all the affairs of France for eight years, *when* he became." Read, "He *had* conducted . . . *before*," &c.

P. 32, "Accountable officers were subjected to security." "Les officiers comptables sont assujettis au cautionnement," — "Officers who have to render accounts are obliged to give bonds."

P. 38, "Condemned to death *by* contumacy"! .

P. 55, "The nobles . . . obtained the condition . . . that compensation should be made for noble property which they had sold and plebeian property which they had purchased within a century," — an utterly unintelligible statement. The original is, "que l'on compensât les biens nobles qu'ils avaient vendus et les biens roturiers qu'ils avaient achetés depuis un siècle"; which, properly translated, means, "that the noble property they had sold and the plebeian property they had purchased should be set off one against the other."

P. 58, "The imposts on consumption produced more and more in proportion *as they were freed from burdens*," — unintelligible. The French is, "à mesure qu'on les dégrevait," "in proportion as they were lightened," i. e. not *freed from burden*, but made less burdensome.

We might extend our list of errors indefinitely, but we pass to another chapter, the subject of which — Society and Literature — affords fewer difficulties to a translator. But we find similar defects here, and examples of even greater carelessness.

What can be more inelegant than this passage on p. 140, in which, speaking of the petty nobility, the translator says: "The king and Colbert wished to open to *it* the resource of commerce, but *it* refused to countenance *it*, and would accept no other honorable resource than positions in the army, which *it* filled to overflowing. The great lords, in their turn, *once fully encumbered*, fell back upon the king for support." *Bien obérés*, rendered "fully encumbered," means "deeply involved."

On the next page, it is said that the king deprived certain "offices of all character of direct or indirect property, *for the purpose of* reducing them again to mere temporary functions"; this should be "*by* reducing them again," &c.

Passing much over, we find on p. 154 the assertion concerning Huyghens, that "To an epoch *subsequent to his life* belong, at least by the date of their publication, his admirable studies on light." The original has it correctly, *à une époque postérieure de sa vie*, "to a subsequent period of his life."

On p. 156 a curious blunder occurs. "Indefatigable workers," it is

said, "passed their lives in extracting materials for history from the *careers* of the past." The original has *carrières*, and the sentence becomes intelligible by reading *quarries* for *careers*.

On p. 163, it is said that Louis "may, as is related, have breakfasted with the poet [Molière] in his room." Hardly. The original is *faire manger le poète avec lui le matin dans sa chambre*, "may have had the poet to breakfast."

P. 167, "Doubtless a few rhetorical commonplaces may be raised up against" Boileau. This is not what M. Martin says, but that one may remark in the works of Boileau some rhetorical commonplaces.

On p. 171 we read the illogical assertion, that "we must listen to many prosers to discern flashes of true poetry . . . in Quinault"; but M. Martin says justly, that "we must undergo many insipidities in order to reach the flashes of true poetry in Quinault."

P. 182, "the fluid and numerous verse" of Racine, should be "the fluent and harmonious verse." On the same page a curious ignorance is displayed in the translation of the words "Le roman de Renard . . . avait donné à l'apologue le développement des Chansons de Gestes," by "The novel of Renard had developed apologue into *Chansons de Gestes*." The proper translation is the literal one, "The romance of Renard had given to the apologue the proportions of the *Chansons de Gestes*," and a note should explain, for the benefit of unlearned readers, the character of the *Chansons de Gestes*.

P. 185. Here is the strange statement that "the age was *anthropomorphous*, he too, he who," &c. The phrase in the original is no doubt a poor one, but it is very different from this, — "the age was anthropomorphist, it too, it which," &c.

Pp. 202 and 205. The word *gestes*, properly used in the meaning of the *action* given by an artist to the figures in his composition, is mistranslated by "tricks" and "artifices."

Pp. 208 and 209, "site" is mistranslated by *site*; it means, as the context shows, *prospect*.

P. 210, "Mythology was no longer but a great enigma," — "La mythologie n'est plus qu'une grande enigme." Properly, "Mythology is nothing but [no more than] a great enigma." This common idiom often troubles the translator.

P. 213, "The treasures of France were dwindling away in the drawing-rooms of Versailles," — "Les trésors de la France s'amoncellent dans les salons de Versailles"; correctly, "The treasures of France are heaped in the saloons of Versailles."

Pp. 236 and 239, *les réformés* is, with strange ignorance, translated "the Reformers," instead of *the Protestants*.

In a letter recently published in the newspapers, M. Martin expresses in the warmest terms his satisfaction with the translation before us, and compliments it on the ground of its perfect fidelity, not only in expressing "the substance, but the turn of expression of the thought of the author." "The literary and philosophic history surpasses," he says, "what seemed to me possible." We have given our readers some means of judging of M. Martin's standard of the possible in regard to the literary history. We proceed to show more briefly its value in its application to that portion of the history which treats of philosophy.

In Vol. II. p. 231, the sentence, "*Boileau en prenant si vivement parti pour Descartes contre Aristote, prouva que son adoration des anciens n'était rien moins qu'un aveugle fétichisme,*" is rendered wholly contrary to its meaning, — "*Boileau proved that his adoration of the ancients was nothing except a blind fetichism.*" Correctly it should read, "*was anything but a blind fetichism.*"

P. 239. In speaking of Spinoza's idea of extension, the phrase *étendue intelligible*, meaning extension as apprehended in thought, is translated by the incomprehensible words "intelligent extension."

On the same page, in the account of Spinoza's doctrine concerning the soul, where the original has, "*L'âme humaine est un mode de la pensée de Dieu destiné à tomber dans le temps,*" we find the inexplicable translation, "The human soul is a mode of the thought of God, *destined to fall in time.*" The true meaning is, *destined to fall into the sphere of time.*

But we will not go on. We are weary of this unpleasant task, in which we have engaged solely with the hope that the exposure of the errors in these two volumes may prevent the remainder of the translation from being disfigured in like manner, and thus deprived of value for careful readers. In the proper execution of the work, the public have an interest with which that of the publishers and of the translator ought to correspond.

The publishers should secure the services of some competent scholar to revise the translation of future volumes before they are put to press.

5. — *Meditations on the Essence of Christianity, and on the Religious Questions of the Day.* By M. GUIZOT. Translated from the French, under the Superintendence of the Author. New York: Charles Scribner & Co. 1865. 16mo. pp. 356.

It is interesting to see what so eminent a statesman, historian, and philosopher as M. Guizot has to say on those deeper questions of the